



The Navajo Nation  
Office of the President and Vice President

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**President Nez and Vice President Lizer welcome U.S.  
Small Business Administrator Guzman to the Navajo Nation**



**PHOTO:** Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer meeting with U.S. Small Business Administration Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman and Navajo business owners and supporters at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Ariz. on Feb. 22, 2022.

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — On Tuesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Vice President Myron Lizer, and Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie welcomed Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman, the head of the U.S. Small Business Administration, to the Navajo Nation to discuss the economic impact of the Biden-Harris Administration's American Rescue Plan Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and to hear concerns and recommendations directly from Navajo entrepreneurs and business owners. The meetings were

held at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Ariz. and marked Administrator Guzman's first official visit to the Navajo Nation since being appointed by President Biden in January 2021.

Administrator Guzman was joined by the SBA's Office of Native American Affairs Assistant Administrator Jackson S. Brossy, who is a member of the Navajo Nation and the former Executive Director of the Navajo Nation Washington Office, who is responsible for providing support for Native Americans to develop and expand small businesses and to ensure that they have full access to the necessary business development and expansion tools available through the agency's entrepreneurial development, lending, and procurement programs.

"We have many intelligent and gifted Navajo people who are striving to create and grow their businesses and give back to our people and communities in the form of jobs, revenue, and the goods and services they provide. Through their commitment and innovation, our entrepreneurs persist through the federal and tribal red tape that hinders progress. Together, we are working with the Biden-Harris Administration to create solutions and one example is a white paper that our administration developed outlining regulations that need to be updated, which is being considered by the White House and our congressional leaders. We had a productive discussion with Administrator Guzman, Assistant Administrator Brossy, and our Navajo entrepreneurs who represent a big part of our local economy," said President Nez.

During the visit, President Nez, Vice President Lizer, and Administrator Guzman also met with Navajo business owners who comprise the Dineh Chamber of Commerce, which was created to provide a voice for Navajo-owned businesses to create positive working relationships with businesses, organizations, and governments doing business on or near the Navajo Nation.

Vice President Lizer, a long-time business owner, spoke about the need to create an "economic bubble" where Navajo people can stay close to home and have access to more products and services to help promote and sustain the "Buy Navajo, Buy Local" initiative. He also commended the recent revisions to the Buy Indian Act, which allows federal agencies to set-aside procurement contracts for Native American owned and controlled businesses, eliminates some restrictions on specific construction contracts, and expands opportunities for subcontracts.

"It's wonderful that a handful of Navajo entrepreneurs had this opportunity to let their issues and recommendations be heard by Administrator Guzman. None of these issues are new, but they need to be heard at this level of government to create the changes that are necessary to support economic growth and sustainability. We have an all-hands-on deck mentality when it comes to working together with business owners and those who aspire to one day own a business," said Vice President Lizer.

Dalvin Etsitty, a member of the Navajo Nation who owns and operates Antelope Canyon Navajo tours in LeChee, Ariz., spoke about the challenges with complying with federal regulations and requirements to develop water, electric, and wastewater infrastructure for his business. He stated that he was able to drill a water well to provide running water, but continues to experience challenges with a wastewater system.

Dineh Chamber of Commerce interim chair Lydelle Davies said the COVID-19 pandemic relief funds for businesses highlighted the vast number of Navajo business owners and artisans. According to the Division of Economic Development, over 7,000 Navajo business owners and artisans received relief funds through the CARES Act due to the pandemic.

Michael Smiley with Navajo Electric, Darrell Brown with Denny's restaurant, Kristine Laughter with Change Labs, National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development Board chair Derrick Watchman, Diné Development Corporation CEO Austin Tsosie, Diné College President Dr. Monty Roessel, Coconino County Supervisor Lena Fowler, and Coral Evans with U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly's Office were also part of the roundtable discussion.

During her visit to the Navajo Nation, Administrator Guzman also visited several Navajo-owned businesses including Ah-Shí Beauty store and Naatsedlozii Convenience Store. She also met with members of the 24<sup>th</sup> Navajo Nation Council and the Division of Economic Development.

"It's widely known that our surrounding economies highly covet the dollars of Navajo consumers. To enhance our economy within the Navajo Nation, we have to work together. Historically, our Nation has faced challenges and disparities due to infrastructure and lack of resources. As leaders, we can push and pass legislation and policy, hoping it will solve the problems, which provides a step towards the solution, but it rests in the power of the people. Our people and small businesses are vital to building and maintaining our infrastructure and economy. Therefore, as an administration, we have to seek opportunities and promote positive change effectively," stated Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie.

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